PERSPECTIVE ON ASEAN DEFENCE SECURITY FORESIGHTING IN THE NEXT TWO DECADES

Overview

In the past decade, ASEAN member states has faced tremendous challenges on its defence and security front. The inception of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) in 2006 and ADMM Plus in 2010 has improved and strengthened regional cooperation on a wide range of defence and security matters among ASEAN member states and its dialogue partners. The formation of Expert Working Groups (EWG) on Maritime Security, Counter-Terrorism, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, Peacekeeping Operations, Military Medicine, Cybersecurity and Humanitarian Mine Assistance is a testament of the regions' and plus members commitment to address the challenges in numerous ways varying from dialogues, confidence-building efforts to concrete practical activities.

Despite all these, the rapidly changing strategic and defence security environment continues to test the effectiveness of the concerted efforts and cooperation by ASEAN member states and dialogue partners, in addressing the complex and dynamic security challenges, in the best way they can. This paper highlights three security issues that would dominate ASEAN defence and security environment and impact defence cooperation in the next two decades which are emerging technology, major power interplay in the South China Sea, region-based terrorism and climate change.

Foresighting in the next two decades

Emerging Technology

The 4IR technology in particular cuts cross many issues from economic, political, security and environment dimensions. The current new technology age is moving at a fast pace especially with the maturity of the third industrial revolution and advent on the fourth industrial revolution or Industry 4.0. The fourth industrial revolution is transforming how everyone operates especially with the emergence of Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data, Cloud Computing and Artificial Intelligence for example. Though the benefits brought by technology is endless, it also poses a wide range of potential risks to nations and regional security. The IoT for example, will allow more users and devices to be connected; however, the more devices connect to the Internet, the greater physical damage attackers can bring on to the systems and nation.

In ASEAN itself, member states are going through a rapid technological development needed to support its high internet penetration and growing demand for technological applications such as AI, IoT and Nanotechnolgies. As such, the digitalisation of the region's economy is inevitable.
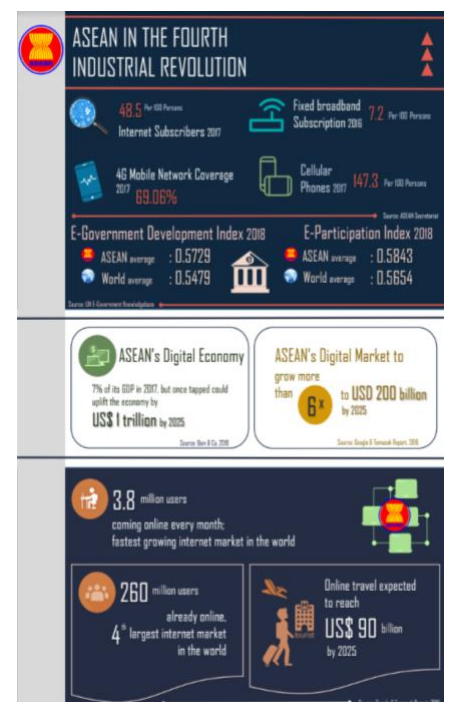
On the positive note, technological advancement has transform how the economy works as business transactions (online retailing, purchase and banking) are easier and more efficient. The continuous progress to digitalise the economy present a big opportunity for ASEAN to boost its economy, to be economically integrated and in both competition and cooperation with one another. However, the variation in technological

maturity among each of ASEAN member states might be a hurdle for them to further cooperate in addressing technology-security related issues.

The region's high internet penetration and progressive technological advancement is also not match with an equal technological capability needed to cope with the emerging technologies and security issues that comes with it. ASEAN member states for example, have only spent around $1.9 billion collectively (with the exception of Singapore) making the member states' infrastructure vulnerable to be manipulated as platforms for cybercrimes and attacks.

The advent of the fourth industrial revolution and the emergence of the IoT, Big Data, Cloud Computing and Artificial Intelligence can be expected to widen the cyber threats in the next two decades. Coupled with the imminent operationalisation and commercialisation of 5G networks, it would create a next-generation threat landscape to the region's security. Most countries are currently still struggling to address the threats posed by today's technologies. Recent data breaches and spread of fake news through social media to influence political process/outcomes in a country has effected already state relations and heightened risks to international security. The prospects of ever more complex technological changes to regulate and control would be more daunting.

Major power interplay in the South China Sea

South China Sea (SCS) remains to be one of the region's continuous flashpoint and an all-time priority that still needs tremendous regional cooperation. There have been significant developments over recent years with the Permanent Court of Arbitration Tribunal judgement in 2016, China's continuous land reclamation works and 'militarisation' on its claimed maritime features, and improved China-Philippines bilateral relations to name a few.

While ASEAN welcome the interests of dialogue partners and friends to work together in many areas including maritime security issues, ASEAN at times are placed in a predicament with the growing interests of countries outside the region keen on maintaining and showing presence in the South China Sea. The interests of these powers in the SCS is reflected with the undertaking of more military and security cooperation such as exercises, intelligence sharing, and capability building efforts. The increasing presence foreign defence forces through exercising its freedom of navigation from the US and UK as well as underlying support of Australia, France, Japan and India in FoNOPS adds on to the existing complexities as ASEAN deals with China related to the SCS. The upmost concern of ASEAN member states are heightened tensions and escalation of military incidences due to misinformation or miscalculation that could lead to unwanted accidents in the air and at sea.

Looking ahead, the strategic challenge would persist as major powers especially the US and China as both continue to aggressively compete and exert influence in the region. ASEAN would need to continue to manage tensions and at the same time ensure its processes within its cooperation framework with China runs smoothly. In moving forward, as ASEAN engages and address issues of mutual interest with the multiple foreign players through capacity building exercises and sharing of experiences and knowledge, this must be in accordance with the needs of ASEAN.

Terrorism

Since ISIS declared a caliphate back in 2014, more than 40,000 foreigners from about 110 nations including hundreds from ASEAN member states have joined Islamic States of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). With the loss of ISIS caliphate territories in the Middle East in 2017 saw remaining ISIS militants were left on their own. Many have decided to fly back home including several hundred radicals from Southeast Asia. While countries like the US

and UK have resorted to blocking returnees, ASEAN member states have strengthened national terrorism laws, and increase regional cooperation to counter-terrorism.

Terrorism presents a real threat to the peace and stability of the region and would likely remain a threat in the long term. In recent years, ASEAN experienced an increasing terrorist attacks including ISIS failed attempt to establish a mini state in Poso in 2015 and ISIS siege of Marawi in 2017. Despite ISIS losing its battle in the Middle East, their extremist narratives remain to be a huge problem, regionally and globally. In this regard, ASEAN member states is vulnerable to be exploited and influenced by extremist and radical ideology. The instances of self-radicalisation through social media also remains a high threat in the region as there is still sympathisers who could act on behalf of radicalised individuals within the region. It is important to continue to counter negative narratives that showcase ASEAN member states and ASEAN as a whole that values cohesiveness and harmony based on a community that is tolerant and respectful of all cultures, languages and religions.

Climate Change

Countries in the region are also increasingly vulnerable to climate change and its impacts. While the UN predicted increases incidences of flooding through the year 2040 in the region; the Global Climate Risk Index reflected that four of the world's ten countries most affected by climate change are located in the Southeast Asia such as Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. A study conducted by the Asian Development Bank further projected a 4.8 °C rise in annual temperature and a 70 cm rise in sea level by 2100 in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. This makes it important for ASEAN member states to mitigate against challenges of climate change as the region has large coastal communities.

The region is also one of the most disaster-prone areas globally; and the changing and uncertain weather extremes associated with global warming and climate change will likely increase climatic-related disasters in the region. Looking back at disasters in the past 15 years in the region, Southeast Asia has had numerous disastrous incidents including the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami affected 14 countries including Indonesia and Thailand. This was the third largest and strongest disaster recorded where more than 230,000 people killed, more than 600,000 people affected, and 141,000 houses destroyed. In 2008, cyclone Nargis affected numerous countries including Myanmar killing a total of 140,000 people and affected 3.4 million people region wide. The devastation of typhoon Haiyan in 2013 that swept through Northern Southeast Asia caused high death tolls (more than 6,000 people lost their lives) and damages on houses and constructions.

Last year, ASEAN experience numerous intense disasters including the Typhoon Mangkut in the Philippines in September 2018 affecting 2,634, 617 people; earthquake and tsunami in Palu Indonesia in October 2018 affecting 82,775 people and as recent as January 2019, Indonesia experienced landslide and flooding in Indonesia that affected 6956 people. The growing intensity of disasters in the region is a reminder for ASEAN on the immediate action needed to address the impact of climate change. ASEAN member states had done and achieve a lot under its numerous initiatives driven by AHA Centre. ASEAN member states also need to

continuously strengthen their community resilience, enhance knowledge on best practices in terms of skills and knowledge needed during disasters, sharing of technical know-how knowledge, and including skills in climate prediction and enhancing regional warning systems.

In supporting ASEAN's readiness and preparedness in HADR, the defence sector also need to continuously be prepared and improve the region's defence coordination and cooperation through bilateral or multinational HADR exercises and cooperation, and to upgrade their capabilities and assets adaptable to climate change.

Conclusion

The next two decades would unravel opportunities for cooperation in defence and security against a precarious security environment that is unpredictable and increased uncertainty. Policy makers in ASEAN needs to take on a coordinated and collaborative approach with relevant stakeholders. It could no longer hold on to traditional top down approach but requires involvement from all levels at the public, private and community level as well as across all sectors with ASEAN in dealing with the security challenges.